"Encounters with Strangeness" in the Post-9/11 Novel
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Ever since September 11, 2001, and the so-called war on terror consequently declared by U.S. government, terrorism and fundamentalism have probably been some of the most discussed terms in the media and academy worldwide. Many recent studies have consequently focused on the sociopolitical dimensions of 9/11 in relation to terrorism and Middle Eastern politics, but very few have ventured to analyze its cultural and aesthetic representation. Not surprisingly, several novels have also recently appeared which thematize directly the causes and effects of the 9/11 events on individuals and the image of the perpetrators as America's other. Studies of the literary and cultural image of the cataclysmic events of 9/11 and their aftermath still lack a comprehensive theory that can accommodate all the major approaches to the questions of how and what, or (e)valuation and representation of such disaster and its assumed perpetrators. This research project proposes to analyze the content and representational modes of the traumatic events of 9/11 in relation to otherness as reflected in most recent American fiction. Updike and Delillo's two novels are hence studied as narratives basically consecrated to encounters with otherness and strangeness.

Many works of fiction that deal with 9/11 engage with the traumatic nature of terrorism and the war on terror in its confined domestic context.[1] They are merely concerned with the traumatic affects of the disaster and the apocalyptic obsessions with dystopian end times. Richard Gray pinpoints that "A further measure of the limitations of these texts is their encounters with strangeness" (135). On the contrary, John Updike's *Terrorist* (*T*) (2006) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (*FM*) (2007) manage to portray terror in regard to otherness in its global as well as domestic contexts. Not only do the two novels shed light on the intricate nature of otherness in relation to capitalist utopia, but they also attempt to reconstruct the missing link between aesthetics and politics and audaciously point out the potential intimacy between the victim and the victimizer. Though both novels draw heavily on popular Orientalism and stereotypes, they venture to

analyse and intermesh the quiescent parameters of Islamic radicalism and Western autoimmunity as dramatically reflected in the personal lives of the perpetrators and their victims. They, furthermore, supersede the shallow image of the Middle Eastern uncanny villains dismissed as "the bad guys" in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (92) with a passionate analytical portrait of a terrorist prone to emergent individual and social frailties rather than to inherent debilitating cultural and intellectual models or value systems. These narrative works are thus an expression of the cultural ambivalence toward the other, a step toward beginning a new kind of writing that does not easily conform to Orientalist conventions and simply perpetuate existing traditions. It is a writing that challenges these conventions and traditions that are informed by the familiar oppositions between "them" and "us", East and West, and the pre-modern and modern.

One striking similarity among the two works is that what initially appear to be three disparate experiential territories (the modern, the sacred, and the feminine) at some point merge into one another and are seen to be multiple facets of the same structures of strangeness and strategies of reconstruction. The encounter with strangeness has varied almost infinitely from one writer to another. However, there are recurrent themes in the post-9/11 novel: a disenchantment with, and at times a rejection, of Western modernity and consumerist capitalism; a quest for redefining the relationship between the human and the sacred; and the view of strangeness as problematically engaged with gender and sexuality. For a writer like Updike, the exploration of the postcolonial relation between the US and its Arab others reflects his fundamental concern with middle, white America in relation to is construction of race, ethnicity, sexuality and religion, while for Delillo, the engagement with strangeness and terrorism keeps in line with his suspicions, disappointments and anger regarding Madison Avenue's dream of American corporate capitalism. Given the significance of cultural criticism in the context of a postnational global system, Updike and Delillo's novels are viewed and analysed as cultural texts that are critical of home as found. With regard to the relation between terror and cultural critique, this article adopts a postcolonial perspective according to which, in Elleke Boehmer's words, an "alternative reading of terror allows us to examine its

occurrence in the reciprocally violent historical contexts of colonialism and global neocolonialism rather than of the ahistorical "war on terror" in which terror is viewed simply as savage and irrational, an irruption of the primitive" (147). By adopting such postcolonial stance concerning terror, the article attempts to readdress the problematic relationship between the histories of colonial and postcolonial terror. Far from justifying state or nonstate terrorism and national or international terrorism, such critical reading would attempt to deconstruct the equivocal and hence politically charged concept of terrorism against the grain of American public and official political discourse. Western media and the U.S. State Department use the term *terrorism* as a self-evident concept with regard to the non-Western other or enemy. According to post-9/11 public discourse, terrorism is inextricably bound up with the concept of the enemy, a vague abstraction that is amorphous and pervasive in different and unrelated political contexts. For instance, in his discussion of "War on Terror" in October 28, 2005, G. W. Bush draws a similarity between Islam and communism, regardless of their political, historical and cultural differences: "The murderous ideology of the Islamic radicals is the great challenge of our new century. Yet in many ways, this fight resembles the struggle against communism in the last century" (5). Similarly, in regard to the most recent anti-government protests and revolutions in Arab countries, American public and media discourse is still generally haunted by the threat of Al-Qaeda, Islamist radicalism, Islamic states and religious directions.[2]

This study adopts a counter-Orientalist approach in dealing with the post-9/11 novel and its representation of Islamic culture and Muslims. Though many American politicians, including ex-presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush, have claimed that the real anti-terror battle is between the West and Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism, many neo-liberal philosophers of the global state, like Fukuyama, Lewis or Huntington, understand globalization as an evangelical civilizing project which must dismiss oriental despotism, Muslim fundamentalism and Islam in general. In Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, Islam is represented as the West's main other which is "seen as a source of nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and, in Europe, unwanted migrants" (215). Although several critical studies of terror and religious fundamentalism provide

some evidence of potential causes of terrorism in general, no comparable studies have examined the literary representation of the dormant drives toward 9/11 disasters in terms of the Orientalist tradition in particular. This research takes Orientalist notions of Islam and Orient as a point of departure for exploring the political image of 9/11 events and their perpetrators. This stance is predicated on Edward Said's notable studies of Orientalism in which Islam has always been considered as belonging to the non-West or Orient, and hence has been looked at "as if it were one monolithic thing, and then with a very special hostility and fear" (4). The close affinity between the 9/11 discourses and modern Orientalism is taken into consideration as far as the dominant stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims are concerned. John Esposito has noted, "For many in the West it is axiomatic that Arabs are nomads or oil shaykhs, denizens of the desert and harems, an emotional, combative, and irrational people. Islam is equated with holy war and hatred, fanaticism and violence, intolerance and the oppression of women" (5).

Strangeness and the Modern

Terrorism is in many ways a sort of an implicit resistance to imposed modernity and global imperialism. In other words, it is not just the "rejection of the kind of modernity and secularization that in the philosophical tradition is associated with the concept of Enlightenment" (Borradori 14) as much as it is a new prism through which the Western project of modernity can be neutrally appraised and critiqued for remedy. Rather than endorsing the monolithic Orientalist view that Islam is inherently anti-Western and anti-modern, many Western philosophers and cultural critics verify the fact that September 11 marks an apocalyptic zero-point for the global capitalist system rather than a mere clash of civilizations and cultures. To Jean Baudrillard, "There is, indeed, a fundamental antagonism here, but one which points past the spectre of America (which is, perhaps, the epicenter, but in no sense the sole embodiment, of globalization) and the spectre of Islam (which is not the embodiment of terrorism either), to *triumphant globalization battling against itself"* (11). On the other hand, Slavoj Zizek delivers a more detailed description of the cultural malaise of Western consumerist society in relation to 9/11: "The ultimate threat does not come from out there,

from the fundamentalist Other, but from within, from our lassitude and moral weakness, loss of clear values and firm commitments, of the spirit of dedication and sacrifice" (*Desert of Real* 154). Such diagnostic critique exposes the ills of modern Western society and the intellectual paradigms that underlie their insurgence. It does not blame native culture as a negative form of xenophobic anti-imperialism and self-defeating sense of wrong.

Terroristic acts are accordingly represented in Updike's *Terrorist* and DeLillo's *Falling Man* as parallel to the global terror of the modern imperium. Narrative structure, action, characters and space reflect the analogy of global force and terroristic counterforce. In place of the ideological antithesis between capitalism and communism in the Cold War, globalization and terrorism are aesthetically portrayed as contending within a singular dynamic for a deterritorialized, transnational power.

Terrorist is the story of a cultural outcast according to the post-9/11 political discourse: a young Egyptian-American, Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, who is persuaded by his local imam to commit a terrorist attack against Infidels or Americans. The parameters of cultural and political seclusion are highlighted in the enclosed space through which Ahmad leads his rituals of transcendence and builds up psychological walls and phobias between himself and the American society. The American society snubs him in return for his assumed difference; he is mistreated by both his schoolmates and his Irish-American mother for his seemingly affected chastity and piety. What finally supervenes with Ahmed's suicide bombing by driving his explosive-laden truck into the tunnel and the subliminal obliteration of self and other is an unexpected epiphany gained through self-revision at the end of the novel. Ahmed's culturally enclosed world is thus kept intact throughout the novel till the very end, where a potential reconstruction of conviviality between an Arab-American and his others is inscribed as plausible.

Analogously, *Falling Man* is subdivided into two worlds and storylines which never meet till the very end on 9/11. The world of Hammad and other terrorists stretches prospectively from the past to the future and spatially from Marienstrasse in Hamburg to Nokomis in Florida and finally to the Hudson corridor up to the crash of the Boeing 767 into the World Trade Center. The world

of terrorism unfolds from Hammad's secluded room or cell, whereas the world of post-9/11 trauma correspondingly develops retrospectively from Lianne's mother's New York apartment. The pre-9/11 world of plotting terror is kept marginalized and apart from the other narrative sections that deal with the post-9/11 shattered life of New Yorkers, represented by Keith Neudecker's immersion in the world of poker and Lianne's deep engagement with Alzheimer's patients and their different emotional responses to 9/11.

Delillo attempts to negotiate both possibilities and their potential convergence by alternating chapters that provide a fairly straightforward description of the terrorist plot with chapters focusing on the daily traumatic lives and experiences of various New Yorkers. The emotional numbness and psychological paralysis of the New Yorkers are thus made to correspond to the intellectual rigidity and stasis of the terrorists. The possibility of convergence is not accomplished till the collision of the plane and tower at the very end, and the final encounter between terrorists and victims is accordingly stressed as an assumed reconciliation through the shift from Hammad's narrative perspective to Keith' in the final climax of the novel. The striking similarity drawn between Hammad and Keith rests more on their common sensation of pain and horror, as the aircraft crashed into the tower. Delillo therefore installs the premise of 'the clash of civilizations' and then subverts it by constructing a counter-narrative of convergence.

The terrorist in both novels is presented as psychologically 'normal' and undisturbed. Unlike crazed psychotics, both Ahmad in *Terrorist* and Hammad in *Falling Man* are young men who came from middle class families and study at high school or at technical institutes in majors such as architecture, urban planning and engineering. They are fictionally formed after the example of Mohammad Atta, the ringleader of al-Qaeda 9/11/2001 terrorist attacks, who was thirty three years old and was in graduate training at the Technological Institute in Hamburg.

In accordance with recent social and ethnographic research on the social and psychological causes of terrorism, any clear pattern regarding the connection between terrorism and poverty or concern for the impoverished is reprobated in favor of the presupposed cultural threat posed to the Muslim World

by the United States and the West. With view to the conclusions of the Pew Global Attitudes Survey of 44 countries from Summer 2002, Jitka Maleckova pinpoints, "The fear of a perceived Western threat to Islam, expressed by the respondents in the Pew poll, deserves serious consideration. The U.S. occupation of Iraq, combined with the memory of the past Western domination of the majority of the Muslim world, persuaded many Muslims that the (Christian) West is (still) fighting Islam" (160).

Thus, both *Terrorist* and *Falling Man* seem to verify the hypothesis of such recent qualitative and quantitative research with regard to the root causes of terrorism. Terrorists are hence portrayed as educated elite set to fight against coercive Western modernity and global capitalism. Fundamentalist terrorists are represented as people who reject merely certain aspects of modernization and globalization, as most of them are delineated as efficient masters of technology and communications mass media. Central to al-Qaida's success in inspiring its followers is a modern feature of the organization: its use of the internet and the media in general and what is named E-jihad or cyber-jihad in particular. In *Falling Man* Hammad and his fellow terrorists are fully cognizant of the danger of state photo reconnaissance, microwave sites, ground stations and floating satellites, and that is why they prefer to talk in person. Terrorists in both texts are furthermore concerned with how their terroristic acts will make headlines all over the world.

However, what these terrorist-fundamentalists reject is the core ethical and intellectual imperatives of modernity. As the editors of the University of Chicago Fundamentalism Project explain, ""modern" is a code word for the set of forces which fundamentalists perceive as the threat which inspires their reaction. Modern cultures include at least three dimensions uncongenial to fundamentalists: a preference for secular rationality; the adoption of religious tolerance with accompanying tendencies toward relativism; and individualism" (Marty and Appleby 1: vii). Those religious radicals feel challenged by pluralistic creeds and norms, the most significant of which is the secular rationality of modernity.

Thus, in *Terrorist* Ahmed Ashmawy feels hostile to Western philosophy and literature, for they are "Godless" and secular. He is tremendously agitated by

the "Godless" sciences of biology, chemistry and physics; to him, the physical verification criteria of science abrogate those metaphysical ones of religion. He disdains his American school teachers, as they "say that all comes out of merciless blind atoms, which cause the cold weight of iron, the transparency of glass, the stillness of clay, the agitation of flesh. . . . Only what we can measure and deduce from measurement is true. The rest is the passing dream that we call our selves" (*T* 4). That is why he tells Jack Levy, his school guidance counselor, that Shaikh Rashid has advised him against going to college and set him on the right track so that he can learn to be a truck driver. Generally speaking, a sense of antagonism is further perceived to exist between the metaphysical and the physical or between Islam and the worldly pleasures of individualistic and consumerist capitalism and modernization. The Secretary for Homeland Security is, for instance, presented as quoting a verse from the Qur'ran that reads: "*The Unbelievers love this fleeting life too well*" to underpin that "The enemy cannot believe that democracy and consumerism are fevers in the blood of Everyman, an outgrowth of each individual's instinctive optimism and desire for freedom" (*T* 47 - 48).

In *Falling Man* Hammad comparatively deprecates Americans' attachment to life. In Florida, Hammad scrutinized American young and old people as entirely absorbed by their MacWorld interests of jogging, watering lawns and eating fast food. According to Hammad, whose vocabulary is markedly punctuated by references to God and jihad, what this pervasive American lifestyle represents is just "world domination" (*FM* 173). Both of the Secretary in Updike's novel and Hammad in Delillo's seem to reiterate the neo-Orientalist scholarship and what Mohammed Arkoun calls the "populist brand of theological axiology" that misconceives modernity itself as the problem challenging fundamentalism, and according to which "the Islamic fact has practically imposed its priority as a platform of resistance against the 'cultural aggression' (*ghazw fikri*) of the West or 'Westoxication'" (266). The reawakening of the life-desire in Ahmed Ashmawy at the end of *Terrorist* and the convergence of the victim and victimizer in *Falling Man* destabilizes such monolithic view.

The same sense of cultural loss associated with the emergence of Western modernity and colonialism is highlighted with regard to the loss of

historical grandeur. The decline of Muslim economic and political power in the modern era is apologetically and partly ascribed to modern Western interventionism. Major modern Arab radical thinkers like Mahmud al-Sharqawi, Sayyid Qutb and Anwar al-Jundi adopt an apologetic response toward the decline of Muslim civilization in modern history; they assert that "it is not Islam that is cause of the Muslim's retardation, but rather the Muslims themselves as well as the imperialist states who have exploited them" (Haddad, *Contemporary Islam* 84). In *Falling Man* the discourse of historical loss is inextricably linked to foreign policies and ideologies through the terrorists' focalization: "There was the feeling of lost history. They were too long in isolation. This is what they talked about, being crowded out by other cultures, other futures, the all-enfolding will of capital markets and foreign policies" (*FM* 80).

The terrorists are hence associated with the Ayatollah's shouting boy soldiers who ran to their death during the Iran-Iraq war to purge their own contaminated history of defeat; according to the old man's story which is told to Hammad, "The boys were sounding the cry of history, the story of ancient Shia defeat and the allegiance of the living to those who were dead and defeated" (*FM* 78). By the same token, Bin Laden is pictured in public discourse as frequently making references to the experience of loss in regard to the devastating impact of Western colonization on modern Islamic history. In his videotape of October 7, 2001, he made a reference to the disgrace that Islam has suffered for "more than eighty years." According to Bernard Lewis, such reference alludes to the defeat of the Ottoman sultanate in 1918, after which Constantinople was occupied and much of its territory was partitioned between the British and French Empires (xvi).

In addition to Western modernization and colonization, the experience of historical demise is analogously attributed to the socio-political hegemony exercised by national dictatorships backed by the imperialist West. In other words, the social aspirations of the bourgeois nationalists are construed by fundamentalists as geared toward neocolonial class consolidation and oppression. In his interview with Giovanna Borradori, Jurgen Habermas identifies "Disappointment over nationalistic authoritarian regimes" as one of the main factors that contributed to the politicization of religious fanaticism in the

contemporary Third World and the drawing of secular nationalists into the snare of the "holy war" (33).

In *Terrorist* Ahmed condemns all Arab leaders, including Mubarak, the Saudi princes and Muammar al-Qadaffi as tools of America. The problem of the double standards of American foreign policy with reference to its complicity with corrupt despotisms is nonetheless raised in a more sophisticated manner in *Falling Man*, where there are two different explanations for the Third World underdevelopment. The first explanation rests on dependency theory that views the failure of modernity in terms of foreign intervention, failed states, empire, oil and the narcissistic heart of the West. In contrast to Martin's comforting attitude of blaming of the Other, Nina Bartos' stance rests on the oppositional status of the inward-looking theory that focuses on national cultural values and attitudes as the main cause of under/development. Nina explains such culture paradigm as follows: "It's not the history of Western interference that pulls down these societies. It's their own history, their mentality. They live in a closed world, of choice, of necessity. They haven't advanced because they haven't wanted to or tried to" (*FM* 47). Linanne's neutral stance between the two opposite directions and her keen interest in the mysterious stillness of the *Natura morta* painting with which she associates the towers might suggest restructuring latent meanings and freeing them from any authoritative comment by either side.

The other's experience of loss in Updike's *Terrorist* and Delillo's *Falling Man*, it may well be argued, is not merely historical, as it engages the modern development of alienation and anomie resulting from the migration from developing to developed countries as well. The removal of the cultural props of family, religion, and social identity left a gaping void that was not historically filled by either Western capitalism or indigenous flag nationalism. Thus, the personal makeup of fundamentalists contributes to their sense of cultural malaise and estrangement. The need of the alienated for a substitute belief system, together with their social need for affiliation, presents fundamentalists with a major challenge.

Updike's novel shows the social and cultural divide between Ahmed's Egyptian father and Irish-American mother, and that is why he is shown as not totally disturbed by the knowledge of his mother sleeping with others. He is fully

aware of the close affinity between Arab belonging and ethnic identity which he appears to undermine as simplistic; he rather feels particularly isolated for he is the only Muslim believer of mixed parentage at Central High school in New Jersey. He is ostensibly disturbed by religious containment, as he is affected with uneasiness, when he beholds mosques created in the towns of northern New Jersey by substituting a crescent for the cross on Protestant churches. Ahmad might represent the third wave Arab-American immigrants, for whom "the mosque became a center for creating an Islamic ethnicity based not only on a shared faith, but also on a shred worldview that envisioned a Muslim community engaged with American society, taking its place in the American religious mosaic" (Haddad, *Quite American* 28). Ahmed moreover takes interest less in diluted Middle Eastern or Arab neighborhoods than in American urban reality and feels extremely repelled by linguistic barriers and incomprehension: "He does not like to linger and chat, as Charlie does, making his way in whatever dialect of Arabic is offered, with laughter and gestures to bridge gaps in comprehension" (*T* 177).

In *Falling Man* Hammad is similarly enclosed in the isolated socio-cultural space of his room. He is too immersed in the enclosing space of his religious identity even to remember the name of the town where he lives in Florida. For him all exteriority is literally dust and all people "invisible". Outside Hammad's room, the whole world is conceived as a mere struggle against the enemy, while any other social or political affiliation is negated. All what Hammad and other terrorists need is a space of their own that represents their segregated authentic identity; this might be found in the mosque, in the portable prayer room at the university, or in the apartment on Marienstrasse. The only sense of unity left to identify with is universal brotherhood and identity politics; in the apartment Hammad and other terrorists felt as "becoming total brothers" in "the house of the followers" or what they called "*dar-ansar*" (*FM* 83).

According to many Western intellectuals, 9/11 exposed the imbalances of the global capitalist system from within. The West's dehumanized techno-scientific culture, tremendous accumulation of wealth, explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions are all considered as factors that contributed to the fall of the towers and the globalized system itself. The potential victimization of both

terrorists and their victims by globalization functions to disrupt political Manichaeism and polarizing distinctions between self and other. In *Terrorist* Ahmad's disenchanted with American liberal freedom and consumerism corresponds to the desolate lives of his mother, Jack Levy, and Beth Fogel, Jack's obese and agonized wife.

Social and political satire of American postmodernity is hence legitimized by Ahmed and other characters' outrage at American materialism and laxity. Levy, for instance, condemns American drug companies that "have turned doctors into crooks" and denounces American leniency with regard to race and sex (*T* 304). However, Ahmad unanticipatedly and progressively becomes aware that annihilating others is against the will of God who wills life and "does not want us to desecrate His creation by willing death" (*T* 306). When Jack Levy, Ahmad's Jewish school guidance counselor, joins Ahmed in his final trip to death in the Lincoln Tunnel, it is Levy who proves more ready to die because of his disgust with the American status quo.

Ahmad, on the other hand, first ignores and then warmly responds to two little black children in a family car ahead of his explosive-laden truck. He recognizes their gorgeous human beauty and decides to assume full ethical responsibility by rejecting the killing and erasing of the other. As Kristiaan Versluys writes, "He recognizes their irreducible uniqueness and their undeniable appeal as fellow human beings, which no ideology or religion can gainsay. The face of the Other implies the absolute injunction-stranger and stronger than any indoctrination-not to take the Other's life" (180). At the last moment, Ahmad becomes able to reestablish mutual interactive religious and ethnic communication with a Jewish-American and African-Americans.

Analogously, in both *Falling Man* and his essay "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September", Don Delillo compares al-Qaeda to America; both are presented as investing in hyper-mediatized reality and injecting fuel into violence, both subjective and objective. The two kinds of violence are opposite but complementary; Slavoj Zizek classifies excessive violence as both the objective, "systematic violence that is inherent in the social conditions of global capitalism" and the subjective violence "of newly emerging ethnic/or religious, in short racist, 'fundamentalisms'"

(*Violence* 12). The major malfunction of such structural, global violence results from the abstraction of the future and the elimination of memory. Delillo writes,

> In the past decade the surge of capital markets has dominated discourse and shaped global consciousness. Multinational corporations have come to seem more vital and influential than governments. The dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the internet summoned us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital, because there is no memory there and this is where markets are uncontrolled and investment potential has no limit.
> All this changed on September 11. Today, again, the world narrative belongs to terrorists. ("Ruins" 34)

In *Falling Man* the two Manhattan towers are simultaneously projected as icons of both global power and vulnerability. Martin asks Nina rhetorically, "Weren't the towers built as fantasies of wealth and power that would one day become fantasies of destruction? You build a thing like that so you can see it come down. What other reason would there be to go so high and then to double it, do it twice?" (*FM* 116) Jean Baudrillard comparatively conceives of the doubling as symbolic of totalitarian superpower that is inherently and universally vulnerable: "Allergy to any definitive order, to any definitive power, is – happily – universal, and the two towers of the World Trade Center were perfect embodiments, in their very twinness, of that definitive order" (6). All the New Yorkers in *Falling Man* are comparatively delineated as dystopian characters submerged by their bourgeois individualism. According to Linda Kauffman, all characters "are obsessed with disintegration: psychic, spatial, temporal, national, and marital" (31). The inevitable reproductions of the dehumanizing nature of liberal society are mostly felt in regard to their view of art and love. Traditionally associated with the sublime, art is turned into a capital value object. The two still lives by Giorgio Morandi are represented in Martin's conversation with Nina and Lianne in terms of commercial value and art market stagnation.

Love, in addition, is equated with mechanical sex. The passion between Keith Neudecker and his alienated wife Lianne is utterly weakened, though they

are sexually united. Both of them are ready to sink into their little lives of poker games and Alzheimer patients instead. Marital relations are further debilitated by Keith's adulterous relationship with Florence, a black woman who survived the 9/11 attacks. What keeps Keith and Florence together is their common trauma experience rather than love; after 9/11 Florence needs "her feelings to register, officially, and needed to say the actual words, if not necessarily to him" (*FM* 91). Though they are psychologically intimate, they are driven apart by a sense of delirium and unreality; Keith thinks that his affair with Florence "was sex, yes, but not romance" (*FM* 166).

Though the two storylines of New Yorkers and terrorists are kept apart all throughout, they converge in terms of thematic and structural analogies. The convergence of the two sub-narratives is a sort of counter-narrative to the binarism of cultural violence and clash between two opposed groups. All the three narrative sections dealing with the New Yorkers ironically bear the names of three characters that are associated with the 9/11 acts of terror on all sides, Middle Eastern, European and American.

The first section is titled 'Bill Lawton" or "bin Laden" as mispronounced by Justin, the young son of Keith and Lianne. The second section is named after "Ernst Hechinger" or Martin Ridnour, Lianne's mother's lover who was a member of the Kommune One radicals setting off bombs against the German state in the late nineteen sixties. In Berlin, he has preserved a famous Most Wanted poster of the nineteen Baader-Meinhof radicals, which DeLillo juxtaposes with the famous newspaper image of the nineteen September 11 terrorists. Though Islamic global radicalism is different from the urban guerrilla groups of *Rote Armee Fraktion* in Western Germany in terms of scope and nature, they share the same objective of considering the United States their number one enemy.[3]

The potential convergence of the two worlds of Islamic fundamentalism and the West is furthermore suggested through the similitude drawn between the jihadists and the German urban guerrillas as pointed out by Nina Bartos: "He thinks they're all part of the same classical pattern. They have their theorists. They have their visions of world brotherhood" (*FM* 147). Finally, the third section features David Janiak who is the falling man of the title or the performance artist who appears at various venues across New York in the years after 9/11. The

iconic image of the falling man that recurs throughout the novel summons the collective figure of the victims of 9/11 falling and jumping from the towers and links the present trauma to the past.

The last narrative section functions to slow down the global narrative spin beyond the 9/11 events and to endorse the fictional and ethical stillness needed for reconstruction of the present. Aesthetic stillness is thematized by the photograph of the suspended state of the falling man and its possible correspondence to "a particular man who was photographed falling from the north tower of the World Trade Center, headfirst, arms at his sides, one leg bent, a man set forever in free fall against the looming background of the column panels in the towers" (*FM* 221).

The stillness motif is further denoted through the Morandi still life paintings that hang in Nina's apartment. According to Martin and Lianne, Morandi's *Natura morta* with its dark items and smoky marks and smudges projects the towers standing and falling. Marie-Christine Leps observes that "by publicly performing what will not be seen, the falling man in *Falling Man* not only questions but reframes what is recognized as true or inevitable; by remembering and repeating a trauma, it calls for a different form of relation to the other, born of ethical responsibility rather than reason alone" (197-198).

Strangeness and the Sacred

The West encounters the religious and sacred ethos of Oriental cultures as a form of strangeness. Founded on secular rationality and scientific relativism, the Western post-industrial society understands the assimilation of the life-world by religion as a drastic aberration. Adopting the secular-liberal stance of the West, Jurgen Habermas pinpoints, "What does strike us as alien in other cultures is primarily the distinctive character of the religions at their core. We see their religion as the source of inspiration of the other culture" (*Time* 157-8). The most profound characteristic of the postmodern world-view has been to put humankind rather than God at its centre. It is this particular feature of both the modern and postmodern world-views which radical fundamentalists challenge the most. In both the fictional worlds of *Terrorist* and *Falling Man*, the terrorist is portrayed as

obsessed more with his relation to God and the sacred in general than with anything else that is secular.

In *Falling Man* Nina comments on such obsession with the sacred: "They invoke God constantly. This is their oldest source, their oldest word" (*FM* 112). The same internal consistency within radical fundamentalist belief lies behind the adoption of the notion of jihad as the divine struggle and violence against the modern West and the choice of other religious groups or sects as their enemies. Bassam Tibi pinpoints, "The emergence of jihadism did not take place outside of the context of Islam's predicament with modernity" (234). The key to comprehending the particular choice of opponent is presented as pertinent to the fundamentalists' selective emphasis on certain parts of the holy book or their intra-textuality. Thus, they are necessarily particularists, that is, they believe that there is only one true version of faith, namely their own.

The sacred is the centre of the fundamentalist's universe. However, the relationship between the human and the sacred in both *Terrorist* and *Falling Man* is dialectical rather than monolithic. It is a relationship that is replete with proximity and distance, verification and questioning. Both Ahmad and Hammad are determinists who kill in the name of God, believing that they were chosen to fulfill the holy task of exterminating the other. Before setting on his final trip to the Lincoln Tunnel, Ahmed thinks of himself "as God's instrument, cool and hard and definite and thoughtless, as an instrument must be" (*T* 285). In *Falling Man*, Hammad and Mohamed Atta similarly consider the fall of America and the West as divinely preordained and think of themselves and jihadists as merely instrumental. Mohamed Atta quotes from the Qur'an to consolidate such view, "*Never have we destroyed a nation whose term of life was not ordained beforehand*" (*FM* 173). The struggle against infidels is thus premised on crystal clear normative principles of purgation and edification. Moreover, jihadists are greatly selective in their reading of the sacred text; they only read "the sword verses of the Koran" (*FM* 83) and seem, for instance, to eschew those of conviviality, tolerance and dialogue.

In *Terrorist* Ahmad believes that jihad is the "struggle to become holy and closer to God" (*T* 108). Ahmed even quotes Sayyid Qutub's concept of *jahiliyya*[4] to justify the jihad ideology and the assassination of enemies, whether they are

the domestic exploiters in secular Muslim states or the foreign ones in America and its allies. In Outub's theoretical framework, the focus of jihad is shifted from a local or national scope to a global one. Thus, the universal parameters of *jahiliyya* are particularly highlighted in Qutub's historical analysis; put simply, *jahiliyya* is explained as "rebellion against God and results in oppression and the exploitation of humanity" at large (Voll 371).

The entire terroristic operation is moreover framed within the ritual of sacrifice and martyrdom. Martyrs are presented as those who voluntarily resign their life to join God by making "blood flow, their blood and that of others" (*FM* 173). Death and martyrdom thus permeate both *Terrorist* and *Falling Man* and haunt all characters. In the final moments before the suicide-bombing or the plane hijacking in 9/11, narrative focalization centers on how both Ahmad and Hammad experience a great euphoria for feeling very close to God. While sensing the military-drab metal box as he drives the truck, Ahmed thinks that when he pushes its well with his thumb, "he will join God. God will be less terribly alone. *He will greet you as His son*" (*T* 305). In the same manner, Hammad remembers the little boys who were used as cannon fodder, massacred in the 1986 Iran-Iraq War and thinks, "There was no feeling like this ever in his life. He wore a bomb vest and knew he was a man now, finally, ready to close the distance to God" (*FM* 172). The two novels thus adopt the jihadist's perspective by portraying his obsession with death as religiously motivated. The jihadists are represented as keen on committing suicide for the sake of ritually purifying themselves in a stark challenge to the moral decay of the infidels.

However, the concept of jihad or the relation between the human and the sacred as based on armed struggle is challenged by both *Terrorist* and *Falling Man*. In contrast to the American media that has demonized the concept of *jihad*, Updike and Delillo attempt to deconstruct it by questioning its totality and inscribing an alternative positive reconstruction. Many contemporary Orientalists, like Bernard Lewis and Laurent Murawiec, either over-assert the military terms of *jihad* ideology in the Qur'an, the commentaries, and the traditions of the Prophet[5], or spotlight *jihad* as a cult of violence and power that is basically characterized by bloodlust. Murawiec, for example, explains the fundamentalists' lust for slaying the enemy as an act of human sacrifice and as a source of

unalloyed joy: "Death is not an instrumentality – like the death of the enemy on the battlefield – it has become an end in itself" (12).

Such Orientalist interpretation overrides the positive connotation of jihad as moral and spiritual striving against one's selfish desires. Jihad connotes striving to serve justice, pursue knowledge, aid the less fortunate—in short, to serve God's purpose on Earth. It entails rigorous discipline and striving to cleanse oneself of vanity and pettiness.[6] Updike's *Terrorist* contests the popular image of military jihad by subverting the mythologized certainty and barbarity of the jihadists. Cast as a modern relativist instead of an adamant determinist, Ahmad in Updike's novel transmogrifies into an adversary of the radical fundamentalists' belief system that presumably demeans his natural prerogatives: "Something preoccupied and bossy in Charlie's approach," Ahmad observes on the occasion of Charlie praising Ahmad's compelling devotion to jihad, "casts doubt on the absolute nature of *istishhad* and the exalted, dread-filled condition of the *istishhadi*" (*T* 250). Ahmad is dauntless enough to question his own faith and that of his Shaikh; he wonders whether his own faith is just a sort of an adolescent vanity that might distinguish him from other schoolmates in New Jersey. Ahmad is moreover pictured as typically human in cherishing the contradictory feelings of terror and exaltation before his assumed final suicidal trip. Little wonder, perhaps, that Ahmad expresses his pity for those victims of 9/11 that jumped. In the last hours before the assault, he studies the Qur'anic sura that stresses that God willed the transition from non-being to being. Surveying bright light in Manhattan and reviewing the Qur'anic sura "The Event",

Ahmad realizes that God applauds creation and prosperity rather than destruction and adversity. "God asks," Ahmad meditates, "*We created you: will you not credit us? Behold the semen you discharge: did you create it, or We*? God does not want to destroy: it was He who made the world" (*T* 306). In this particular instance Ahmad applies individual critical reasoning to recapture the constructive potential of the sacred text, rewrite religious scriptualism and hence promote universal thinking which precludes any kind of blind affinity to *al-asala*/authenticity or cultural particularism. With his focus on the open texture of the sacred text, Ahmad addresses the principle of *ijtihad* or free reasoning to counteract the jihadists' particularistic interpretation of the Qur'anic verses. By

this sympathetic depiction, the author insightfully relocates the potential origins of strangeness not in political polemic but in the kind of ethical humanism that attempts to bridge the gap between the human and the sacred in new terms.

In *Falling Man* Hammad similarly fluctuates between two versions of *jihad* and the potential link to the sacred. Like Ahmad, Hammad harbors a skeptic attitude toward military *jihad*. Whereas Hammad tries to feel one with other *jihadists*, he feels repelled by their gruesome distortion of facts; the result is his feeling that "Everything here was twisted, hypocrite, the West corrupt of mind and body, determined to shiver Islam down to bread crumbs for birds" (*FM* 79). He feels sorry for the Iranian boy soldiers who fell dead in war and is appalled by the sardonic remarks of his fellow jihadists: "They stared him down, they talked him down. That was a long time ago and those were only boys, they said, not worth the time it would take to be sorry for a single one" (*FM* 80). In the last days before 9/11, Hammad is resolved to perform the "unwritten" duty of martyrdom, but he persists in interrogating the ultimate validity of killing himself: "But does a man have to kill himself in order to count for something, be someone, find the way?" (*FM* 175) Absolutism is furthermore challenged by the analogous, interrogative skepticism of the New Yorkers. Lianne, for example, understands God's presence as absence; for her, God remains available and active, immanent and omnipresent, but not recognized. She keeps such distance from God to be able to explore her human freedom; she thinks that "she was free to think and doubt and believe simultaneously" (*FM* 65). Lianne moreover comprehends the close link between theology and domesticity, as her thoughts on faith and God extend beyond the merely religious. A case in point is when she sits in a small poor parish church meditating on the domestic nature of faith and hope: "But isn't it the world itself that brings you to God? Beauty, grief, terror, the empty desert, the Bach cantatas" (*FM* 234). Both Hammad and Lianne thus enjoy a closer affinity with the sacred, as they believe in the unavoidable Sacred Presence of God and are yet aware to a certain extent of their particular human relativism. The alternative to absolutist religious and cultural relativism, that is demonstrated in overemphasis on 'the return of the sacred'[7], 'Political Islam' and identity politics, is thus presented in the form of the de-politicisation of religion and the reconstruction of rationalist, reflexive relativism. Habermas observes that

"modern faith becomes reflexive. For it can only stabilize itself through self-critical awareness of the status it assumes within a universe of discourse restricted by secular knowledge and shared with other religions" (*Time* 152).

Strangeness and the Feminine

In accordance with the popular view that Islam is illiberal, misogynistic and violent, the relation between terrorists and the feminine world is represented as ambivalent in both *Terrorist* and *Falling Man*. In these two works, women stand for the threat of distracting the jihadist from his holy mission of jihad, and hence references to women in terms of contamination or distraction abound in all sections. Mohamed Atta, leader of the 9/11 hijackers, is pictured in public discourse as repelled by the feminine; he is reported to have done the following: walked out of the room as a teenager when belly dancing was shown on television; been offended by his landlady's bare arms in Hamburg; asked for a nude by Degas to be taken off the wall of his student lodgings; withdrawn from help with his thesis because it involved close physical contact with his female helper; and refused to shake hands with the female examiner of his thesis.[8] On the other hand, the female characters in *Terrorist* and *Falling Man* are simultaneously portrayed as agents of edification and naturalization.

In *Terrorist* American girls are generally described through Ahmad's perspective as devils. Ahmad assures Jack Levy in his interview that even his mother cannot escape such moral condemnation; for him, she is "trashy and immoral" and the only reason his father married her was to gain him American citizenship (*T* 35). Patriarchal dominance is thus spotlighted in contrast to feminine degradation; according to Ahmad's fundamentalist codes, the mosque is hence a domain of men, whereas the church is a site of feminine domination. The will to mythologize women in terms of feminine otherness arises, according to the text, from an arguably perverse insistence on their contaminating impact on men. Ahmad quotes the Qur'an to endorse the fundamentalist's view of female physical uncleanness. For him, the Qur'an "talked of uncleanness but only in regard to women, their menstruation, their suckling of infants" (*T* 156). Though Ahmad is apparently repulsed by sexual attraction, he is inertly fascinated by Joryleen Grant, an African-American classmate. He is hence partly

pleased that she notices and likes him. Updike's realist portrayal of the accord between an Arab-American young man and an African-American young woman addresses and subverts the polarized racial discourse of American literature and culture. "Inside a racial unconscious," Jay Prosser writes, "Updike has replicated otherness but also fictionalized solidarity. His works show the divide but also create surprising, generative encounters" (76). Though Ahmad hates the songs Joryleen sings of Jesus and sexual longing in assembly programs, he accepts her invitation to hear her sing in the choir of her African-American church. Contrary to his expectations, he is impressed by the "kafir friendliness" (*T* 51) of the little black pigtailed girls beside him and is excited along with the rest of the congregation by the preacher's story about Moses and Aaron. The encounter with Joryleen in the church marks the beginning of Ahmad's growing attachment to the other. The second time Ahmad meets Joryleen, he is struck by the fact that she became a hooker to please her boyfriend and get him money. He treats her tolerably and reminds her of the occasion where he saw her decently dressed up in choir robes. Ahmad moreover nominates Joryleen to take a sum of money as a compensation for his final sacrifice to help her achieve freedom from white men manipulating her sexuality. He even esteems her as "the only bride he will enjoy on Earth" (*T* 238). Ahmad's relationship with Joryleen unfolds along the development he achieves in his self-education and the reconsideration he has of gender roles and relations. Therefore, the transformation of the jihadist's image of the feminine destabilizes the dialectic between masculine and feminine and the religious and the secular.

Similarly, in *Falling Man* Hammad is emotionally engaged with a German, Syrian, Turkish woman called Leyla. He wants to marry her and have babies. He is attracted to her, for she feels curious about his studies and friends. On the other hand, Mohamed Atta rebukes Hammad for allowing such intimate relation with the feminine to drag him away from solidarity with his fellow jihadists. The demands of self-consciousness thus take precedence over self-forgetfulness, and guilt thus forms an indispensable component of the protagonist. Hammad knows that he "had to fight against the need to be normal. He had to struggle against himself, first and then against the injustice that haunted their lives" (*FM* 83). For Hammad, the world at large, including Leyla, is dismissed to irrelevancy,

because he regrettably knows that "soon she would begin to exist as an unreliable memory, then finally not at all" (*FM* 83). Both Updike and Delillo expose the jihadist's love-myth, then, as doomed to disappoint; yet the proliferous occasions of conviviality and understanding between the jihadist and female characters testify also to the incontrovertible excitement of the imperfect encounter.

Conclusion

Like Lianne, both Updike and Delillo "felt all the bitter truth that stereotypes contain" (*FM* 185), especially in regard to Arab jihadists. The terrorists' goal is therefore presented as not to replace the ideology of the West with one more firmly rooted in the universal ethics of human rights and liberty but to substitute one totalitarian and dehumanizing system for another. Unlike cultural-relativist postmodernists or radical Islamists, both Updike and Delillo hold a balanced view that acknowledges the twin evils of Islamophobia and anti-Westernism. On the one hand, in both novels the models of Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' and Qutub's '*jahiliyya*' are comparatively rebuffed as instigating inter-civilizational conflict. On the other hand, Updike focuses on the rich alternative of multiculturalism in the post-9/11 American society, whereas Delillo spotlights the significance of an ethical universalism that acknowledges pluralism and diversity in a global context. In Delillo's work, terrorism is projected as particularly "the most absolute *conditio inhumana*" (Agamben 50-51) rather than as basically Islamic or Western. In *Terrorist* and *Falling Man*, modernity is represented as both threat and fascination to the jihadist. Western modernity and globalization are generally condemned in terms of their naiveté consumerist culture and abrogation of the traditional beliefs of society, and they are simultaneously reconciled to the jihadist's obsession with technology and the technoeconomic power of the media. Both texts attempt to rewrite the conceptualization of the sacred as a universal category of belief, that is, as the essential condition of the possibility of religious feeling and value and thus a meaningful experience in itself, regardless of the jihadists' individual interpretations.

The configuration of the jihadists' ambivalence toward the modern, the sacred and the feminine in the texts seeks to exploit and undercut the public

discourse negative constructions of Islam and jihad. Both Ahmad and Hammad are portrayed as evoking fellow feelings, for they are denied the possibility of normal life. The final intimate encounter between the victim and victimizer in *Terrorist* and the convergence of the world of New Yorkers and the world of terrorists in *Falling Man* bring this home vividly. Encounters with strangeness are thus rewritten to enact the potential reconstruction of the impaired relation between the self and the other.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Many Novels like Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), Slamn Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005). See Robert Eaglestone 361-369.
2. See, for example, the reference to the statement of the Yemeni radical cleric Abdul Majid al-Zindani that "An Islamic state is coming", that is highlighted in the headlines of *The New York Times*, 2 March, 2011.
3. See Amir Taheri 13.
4. *Jahiliyya* refers to a classical Islamic term for the period of paganism that prevailed in Arabia before Islam. The concept of *Jahiliyya* is demonized in Western media discourse as one of the basic foundations of radical

Islamists who reject any dealings or intellectual openness with the West. See Bernard Lewis 79-80.

5. See Bernard Lewis 29-46.

6. See Khaled Abou El Fadl 220-21.

7. See Bassam Tibi 238.

8. *The Observer*, 23 September, 2001.

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